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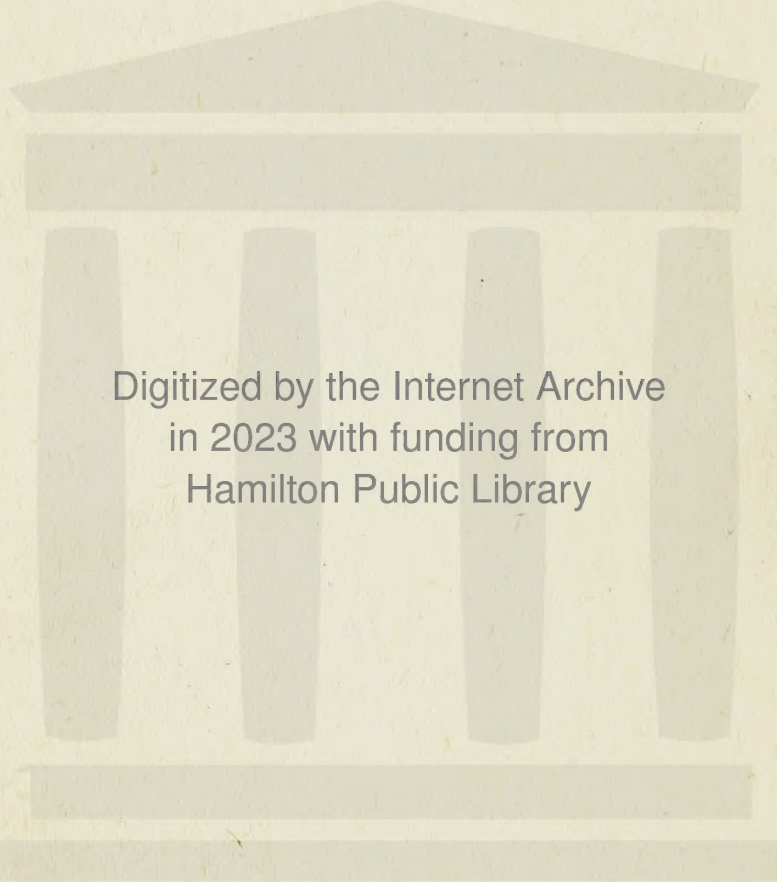
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Brief remarks on the
projected reunion of
Lower and Upper Canada.

by

William Willcocks Sleigh

Montreal, J. Lane.

1822

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PREFACE.

It may be thought somewhat rash in the Author of the following remarks (who, having resided in this Country but a short time, may be deemed not sufficiently acquainted with its interests,) to interfere in the discussion of the political concerns of these Provinces. It is true that it is not many years since he left Great Britain; but, it is equally so, that one individual may live in a Country twenty years, and, from indifference or inattention, know less of its situation and resources, than another who, residing in it but one fourth of the time, has contemplated them with a wish for its prosperity. He has always endeavoured, to the best of his moderate ability, to serve his fellow subjects, either by calling their attention to facts not

generally observed, or by removing obstacles to their happiness : conformably to which, he now humbly submits to their consideration a few observations on a subject of no small importance ; not doubting that it will be discussed in a more minute and masterly manner, by some, whom local knowledge, abilities, and leisure from professional avocations, render far more competent.

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BRIEF REMARKS

ON THE

PROJECTED RE-UNION, &c.



AT the present day men are too prone, in the consideration of National or Political topics, to prefer their own *private* interest to the general good—and thus, biassed by the most deceitful and prepossessing of all motives, approve or disapprove of a proposal, according as its effects appear more or less to promote or impede *their* welfare; perhaps, altogether forgetful or careless of the vast advantage that might result to their *immediate posterity*.

There is another principle by which we are perpetually swayed, if not in a greater degree to the former, at least equally so; and that is, *prejudice, or an irresistible attachment* (from a natural weakness, common to all Nations,) *to former or*

pristine peculiarities.——This has ever, in all ages of the World, been the greatest barrier to discoveries and improvements in science or art; and had not some suffered this principle to be subdued and eradicated by their good sense and judgment, how ignorant would we now be of some of the most important inventions; and deprived of many and considerable advantages which we *now* enjoy, and are the direct effects of that prejudice having been conquered; e. g. Legislation, Navigation, Agriculture, Chemistry, &c. &c. &c.

We should not, in this epoch of science, knowledge and liberality, so far degenerate from the disinterested and noble conduct of our * predecessors, who, when general good called upon them, cheerfully, willingly and decidedly sacrificed their *private* interest to the public advantage: when they departed from this line of conduct, anarchy, confusion, and discord were the effects, and these quickly terminated in the destruction of the empire.

Now, to take into consideration that subject which more immediately concerns ourselves; we should, if we value our *real* interest, that of our posterity, and the good of our fellow subjects in Canada, suffer our judgment to subdue our *natural* prejudices (being conscious of the evil and ignorance that would *now* necessarily exist, only

* Particularly the Romans.

for a renunciation of peculiarities on, *ceteris paribus*, similar occasions ; and, like true Romans, sacrifice * *all* if it were necessary, *pro bono publico*.

The topic now proposed for discussion, is the re-union of the Legislatures of Lower and Upper Canada ; how far the accomplishment of this object would prove beneficial or the contrary to ourselves, our posterity, or the inhabitants of these Provinces, is for us to examine.

Unanimity of sentiment, a common interest, one cause to maintain, have always been considered as the strongest and most substantial ties by which Provinces are kept united—the most certain methods of increasing their wealth and mutual happiness ; and finally rendering them an impenetrable bulwark to the encroachments of an enemy.—While the Canadas possess separate Governments, they are more or less deprived of the preceding advantages—are more or less alienated from each other—and are exposed to the evils and prejudicial consequences which invariably proceed from the disjunction of neighbouring States, Provinces &c. The short period which has elapsed since their division, sufficiently proves the baneful effects of it.—They are gradually assuming the character of two distinct nations.—The Upper Province is, in fact, dai-

* In this instance the word "*sacrifice*" is inapplicable, as we are not called upon to *sacrifice* any thing.

ly approximating to the manners, customs, &c. of their neighbours (the United States); and who will deny but more or less of the poison of republicanism is imperceptibly insinuating itself into the minds of numbers of the community.

We are not ignorant of the direful effects of a Republican Government; and the cry of LIBERTY, under such circumstances, is the direct road to imposition, tyranny, and slavery!

Suppose these Provinces to exist some time longer in their present situation; and the effects before related gradually to increase——suppose further, that at any future period the Upper Province should be subdued (which God forbid,) in consequence of the perpetual influx of Americans, as is now the case; assisting their countrymen, and considerably promoted by the present alienated state of the Provinces——why then, a complete inroad is opened upon us, and we either fall a sacrifice to our enemies, previous to receiving assistance from home, (in which case we exchange *real and substantial* liberty for the name, the shadow of it!!) or at least we should be deprived of the greater part of our trade; for the grand commercial source is cut off, and lumber, furs, &c. &c. are conveyed, for exportation, through the United States: in what a lamentable state would traffic then be, in this Province; * we should

* It is almost superfluous to remark that when the commerce of a Country is closed, every other occupation proportionally suffers.

And those who now oppose the Union, the foremost to petition (if it were possible) for it! While therefore an opportunity presents itself of guarding against those evils, let us embrace it——for recollect, a consciousness of our error under those circumstances, would not in the least avail; and beggary, to those who depend on commerce for their subsistence, would be the inevitable consequence!!

There is but one class of individuals here that have any *plausible* reason for objecting to the proposed Union; I mean the Canadians of French extraction; and I am persuaded much of this opposition arises from the measures of, and the advantages accruing from, it, not being fully explained to them.——Nothing could convince me that an objection proceeding from any other source, is not the pure result of self-interest, regardless of the common good.

I say the Canadians have a *plausible* reason for objecting to it, for I am convinced, from what I know of their general character, that they possess a mind too noble to be swayed by false arguments, much less by private interest.

I shall therefore examine all the arguments that I am acquainted with, which they adduce against the Union; and I am inclined to believe that they are referable to the cause I have advanced in my preliminary observations, viz. prejudice, or an irremediable attachment, from a natural resist-

ness (common to all Nations) to former, or pristine peculiarities."

The principal, and indeed the fundamental, objection assigned by the Canadians, is that "if the Provinces were united, they would loose their majority in Parliament"; all the other objections which are advanced seem to depend upon this——it really appears to be the foundation——if I can overturn it, all minor considerations——all the supposed evil consequences, will at the same time be removed——so my enlarging on the subject will be rendered unnecessary.

I candidly acknowledge that the cry "We are going to loose our rights, our privileges, our interest in Parliament &c. &c. which is circulated at the present day, suddenly impresses the mind of the vulgar and unwary, with the apprehension of some great deprivation, and is highly calculated to diffuse a dread that they are in danger of being encroached upon by the English : but the man who, with an enlightened understanding, will use a moment's reflection, and impartially consider the proposition, cannot possibly apprehend such consequences.

I would simply ask, what are the Canadians in danger of losing? What advantage does the British Government anticipate from depriving the Canadians (a people it really loves and respects) of any of their privileges? None at all, quite the contrary : if any trifling alteration

should be made in any of their customs, will it not be for *their* advantage ? is it at all probable that it will propose any thing here, the good effects of which have not been proved by experience in England, France &c. &c. ? certainly not.

The respect which the Government at home entertains towards the Canadians, has been proved on many occasions, but in no instance has it been so conspicuous as in the last session of Parliament——When the bill for the union was proposed, although they all were *fully persuaded of it's utility*, yet they would not pass it *that* session, lest any *possible* objection might be made to it by the Canadians : it is almost an unprecedented circumstance that the parliament should perfectly concur as to the *utility* of a measure, and not adopt it, *lest any might not like it* : nothing could indicate so *peculiarly* the respect paid to the Canadians as this occurrence.

But let us lay aside prejudice, and ask, is there the *smallest probability* that the Government of England intends or wishes to deprive the Canadians of any of their rights, as their Religion, Laws, &c. &c. most unquestionably not : they did not act so, when they might with impunity, and, without the least deviation from the law of Nations.———Certainly it is not likely *now*, when they are daily granting more and more privileges to the Catholics of Ireland——Thus then all this alarm which has been raised

against the proposed Union, if fairly considered, will evidently prove to proceed from the apprehension of evils which could not possibly arise from it.

Further, I would ask, is there a nation on the face of the earth, which enjoys equal privileges with the people of Canada? not one; is not Canada allowed to enjoy all the blessed advantages of the British Constitution, at the same time exempted from all taxes and burdens, by which that Constitution is supported? Who has given them these laws? Britain——Who has given them this Constitution? Britain: to whom could we look to-morrow for assistance if circumstances required it? to Britain——She has, as far as has been in her power, hitherto provided every thing for Canada——She has, by her wise and experienced Legislators, granted to us present privileges*——And she now proposes a plan for the furtherance of our happiness; for the more certain protection of our rights and liberties; and consequently for the common good of all——* Shall we therefore oppose and

* Sir James Macintosh, on the 23d of July last, in speaking for the Canadians in the British House of Commons, says, "A resolution had been passed in 1789, and transmitted to the Colony, for giving a *free* constitution; this was a transition from *absolute* monarchy to *freedom*."

* Is it because a few who, from false pride, or the vague fear of innovation, dread the least alteration in their ancient habits, object to the measure, that all the Canadians are to be unanimous in opposing it? certainly not: are tolls on the public roads, notwithstanding they are essential to the good repair of them, to be dispensed with, because truly they have not been introduced into Canada till lately? shall we be incommoded and have our roads in winter rendered impassable by the present construction of the Canadian Traineaux, because they were used by the first settlers in this Country, notwithstanding a simple alteration in them would obviate every inconvenience, as satisfactorily proved in the Upper Province &c.?

reject this plan? do we not know that the interest of Canada is intimately united to, and blended with, the interest of Great Britain?

Shall we not rather submit to the superior judgment and discretion of her Legislators, having by experience tried and confided in them in more important concerns than this: have they deceived you? have they deprived you of any of your privileges? no——no——There is no Government whatever, whether Republican or Monarchical, under the protection of which you could place yourselves, from which you would enjoy equal, (nay I will aver as many) advantages as you *now* do.

Maturely consider these facts—mistake not the shadow of evil for its substance; but adhere and be guided by, those whom you know by experience possess not merely, sufficient wisdom, but an unchangeable inclination to serve the Canadians.

There is no doubt but more or less opposition will be advanced against the union, by many, some of whom, to maintain a disinterestedness of principle equal to their acquirements and natural abilities, should be the foremost to hail with pleasure such a project; as one best calculated to forward the true interest and welfare of their Country.

But in this, as in all similar cases, men will differ; (“tot homines quot sententiæ”) some

will never be persuaded till they see the good effects of the change : while there are others whose dispositions are so inflexible that nothing, not even the benefits themselves, will convince them of their error.

The Union of Scotland and Ireland was effected against similar, if not greater, opposition than this proposed Union possibly could be : and although the good and inestimable effects to the Public at large from these Unions are notorious ; yet many are even *now* to be found who vociferate against them.*

In answer to these remarks it may be observed that “ if once the Canadians give up their interest in Parliament, they will be completely thrown upon the mercy of the English, and may be deprived in a moment of all their advantages, or at least have their views thwarted &c.”——this argument contains more *apparent* than *real* reason and good sense——for, in the first place, even in the present state of things, they cannot have a single view accomplished, or a law made without the perfect consent and approbation of Englishmen——thus, previous to a bill passing into a law, it must receive the Governor’s sanction, which will not be given without the advice of the Executive Council ; and secondly, after

* Not a few selfish merchants are now to be found in Edinburgh and Dublin, who cry aloud against that change of Government : because their annual income is somewhat diminished, in consequence of the change in the seat of their respective parliaments ; thus, these Gentlemen would sacrifice public good to private views.

the Governor's sanction, the King's approbation must be obtained, which will not be granted without the advice of His Majesty's Ministers.

Thus then the very cause assigned for objecting to the Union "*that of being in the power of the English,*" exists under present circumstances ; and by experience you well know that no advantage has been taken of it.

Further, the various situations of emolument under the Crown are, I understand, fairly divided between Canadians and English ; I believe the majority are filled by the former ; are they afraid of losing any of these posts ?——They cannot, for it is well known they are not obtained by their majority in Parliament, but are at the *disposal and will* of the Governor. Hence the union could not in the least degree interfere with these advantages.

There is no necessity for me at present to enter upon the various minor arguments which have been adduced against the union ; I have, as I proposed before, attempted to attack the fundamental one ; how far I have succeeded I shall not pretend to decide.——I trust no evil will be imputed to the object of my endeavours ; and, as much may be said in few words, I shall conclude by summing up my observations, viz :

First: That men generally (sometimes even unconsciously) prefer their private interest for public good.

Secondly : That people of all Nations adhere firmly, from natural weakness, to pristine peculiarities ; although some of these are actually of a pernicious tendency.

Thirdly. Innumerable and momentous advantages accrue from a unanimity of sentiment &c. between Provinces.

Fourthly. That many and serious evils to Canadians as well as English may, (and it is highly probable will) arise from the present condition of things in Canada.

Fifthly. That although the Canadians have a *plausible* reason for objecting to the union, yet, when fairly examined, none of the evils they dread could possibly arise from it.

Sixthly. That opposition has always been given (such is the nature of man) to similar proposals in other Countries, and, notwithstanding, *lasting advantages* have been the result.

Seventhly, and lastly. That the identical reason they advance for their opposition to the union. viz. "*being at the will of the English,*" actually does under the present state of things exist ; so that ideas are substituted for realities, words for true argument ; and evil effects dreaded from causes, that could not in the nature of things (in any other degree than they might at this moment) produce them.

FINIS.



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